

Head Start State Collaboration Office Needs Assessment

*State of Washington
2008-2009 Survey Results*



June 2009

Introduction

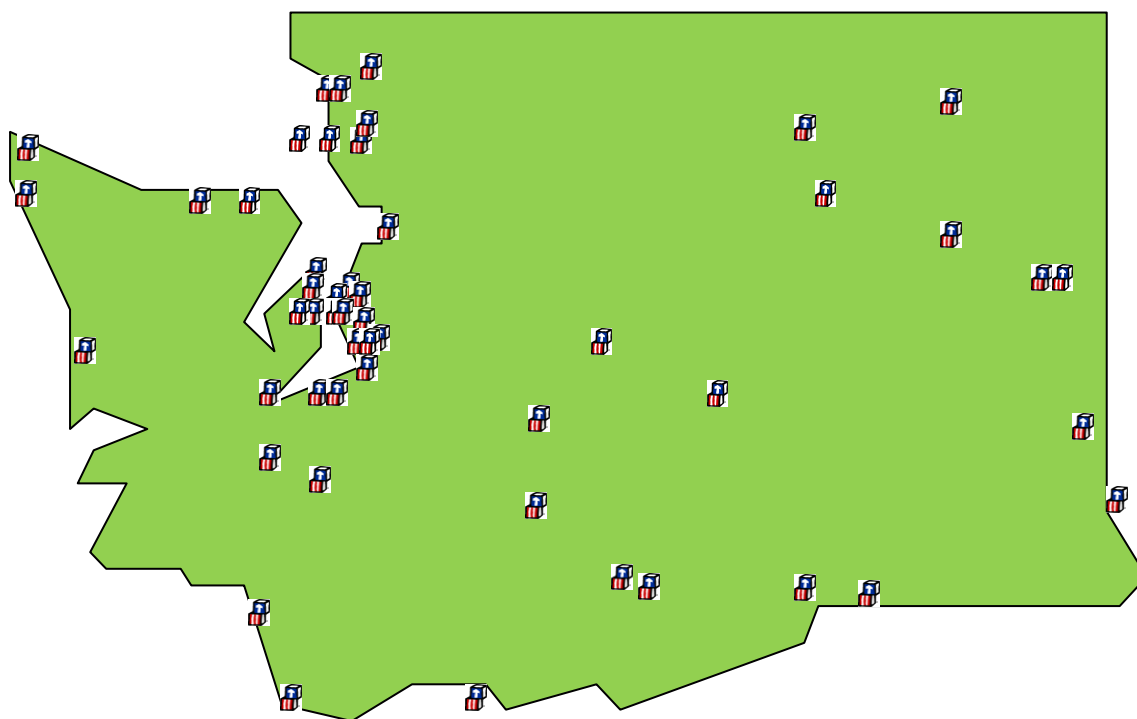
Head Start is a national program that directs comprehensive child development services to help children from low-income families become ready for school. Eligible children ages birth to 5 and pregnant women and their families receive assistance and information in the areas of education and early childhood development; medical, dental, and mental health; disabilities; nutrition; and parent involvement.

The federal Office of Head Start in the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) provides funding for grants to local public agencies, private organizations, Indian tribes, and school systems. These organizations, in turn, operate Head Start programs.

Head Start in Washington State

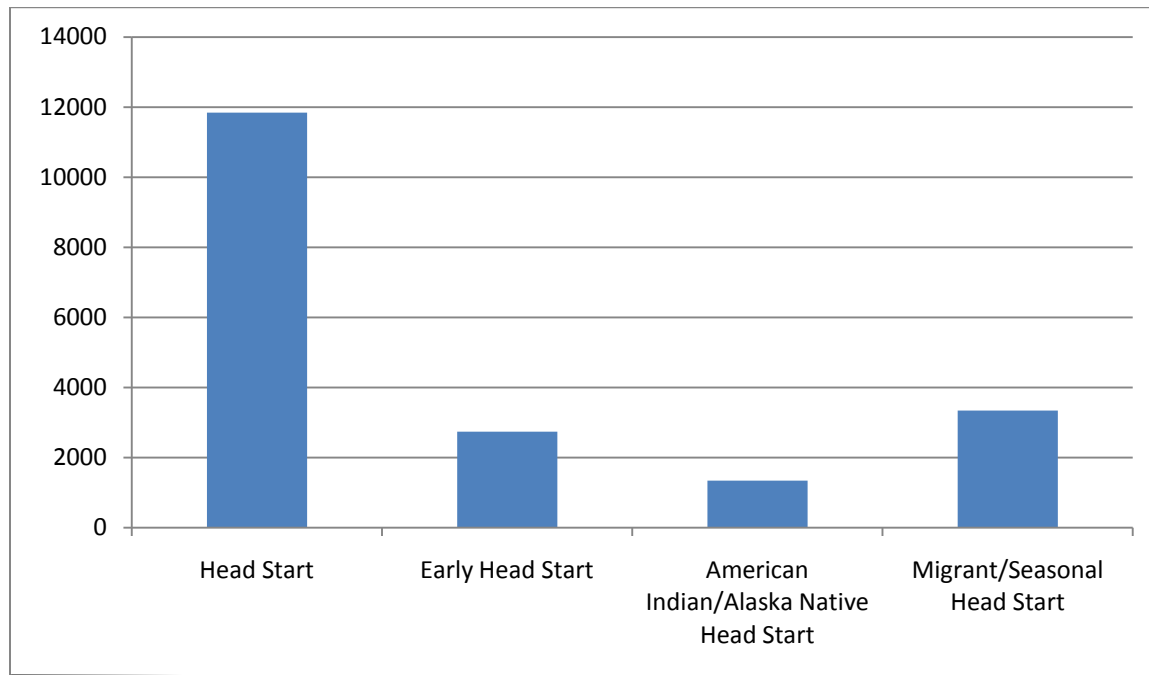
In Washington, there are four different Head Start program options that meet the diverse needs of children and families in our state: Head Start, Early Head Start, Migrant/Seasonal Head Start, and American Indian/Alaska Native Head Start. The programs are geographically located throughout the state, in both rural and urban settings.

Figure 1. Locations of Washington Head Start Programs



In the 2007/2008 year a total of 19,250 children and families were served through 28 Head Start programs, 20 Early Head Start programs, 17 American Indian/Alaska Native Head Start programs, and 2 Migrant/Season Head Start programs in Washington.

Figure 2. Children/Families Served by Program Type



Head Start State Collaboration Office (HSSCO)

The HSSCO in Washington is the main point of contact for Head Start at the State level. It is housed within the Washington State Department of Early Learning (DEL). The HSSCO was established to serve as a state-level support mechanism for the various efforts of Head Start programs to provide quality, comprehensive services to children, families, and their communities. Specifically, the HSSCO is charged with the following three federally-mandated goal areas in its efforts to provide state-level support to programs and all low-income children and families:

- ***Help build early childhood systems and enhance access to comprehensive services and support for Head Start programs and all low-income children and families;***
- ***Encourage widespread collaboration between Head Start and other appropriate programs, services, and initiatives, augmenting Head Start's capacity to be a partner in State initiatives on behalf of children and their families; and***
- ***Facilitate the involvement of Head Start in state policies, plans, processes and decisions affecting Head Start target populations and other low-income families.***

In addition, the HSSCO must focus its efforts on nine (9) HSSCO priority areas that include: ***Health Services; Children and Families Experiencing Homelessness; Family/Child Assistance; Child Care; Family Literacy; Children with Disabilities; Community Services; Education (Publicly-funded Pre-K Partnership Development and Head Start Transition and Alignment with K-12); and Professional Development.***

Needs Assessment Survey

The Head Start Act of 2007 requires that each HSSCO conduct a statewide needs assessment of Head Start programs. The results of the assessment in each state are intended to inform the development of a 5-year strategic plan for the HSSCO which must be updated annually.

Survey Objectives

The Washington HSSCO in DEL released a needs assessment survey in October 2008. The purpose of the survey was to identify the challenges and strengths of Head Start programs in Washington with regard to collaboration, coordination, and alignment of services. The survey was structured around the 9 HSSCO priority areas.

A separate survey was released to partner organizations within the larger early learning community including educational institutions, state agencies, and non-profits. This survey served to solicit broad stakeholder feedback around the priorities and effectiveness of the HSSCO in Washington.

Survey Design

Due to the Governor's state spending freeze on personal services contracts announced in August 2008, the HSSCO was unable to expend federal funds specifically allocated to engage a contractor to facilitate the needs assessment process; therefore, internal resources and expertise were sought to support activities necessary to execute the work. The needs assessment was released in Survey Monkey format in October of 2008. Head Start program directors were each sent a web address for the survey and encouraged to include relevant staff members in its completion. Participation in the survey process was voluntary, however programs were encouraged by the Office of Head Start to respond.

Each of the 9 areas of focus included 3 types of questions:

- Part 1 of each area asked programs to rate their involvement with various service providers and organizations. Participants used a four-point scale and definitions to reflect their progress in relationship building.

No Working Relationship (little/no contact)	Cooperation (exchange info/referrals)	Coordination (work together)	Collaboration (share resources/agreements)
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- Part 2 of each area asked programs to rate the level of difficulty they had with a variety of activities and partnerships, such as sharing data and information with agencies or creating and implementing transition policies with local school districts. The purpose was to identify challenges programs may be experiencing in building successful partnerships at the local and state levels. Programs rated the difficulty on a four-point scale ranging from "Not At All Difficult" to "Extremely Difficult."

Not At All Difficult	Somewhat Difficult	Difficult	Extremely Difficult
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- Part 3 of each area included open-ended questions at the end of each of the nine sections of the survey. These questions asked for feedback on other issues including problems, successes, and

unique challenges facing American Indian/Alaska Native and Migrant/Seasonal Head Start programs.

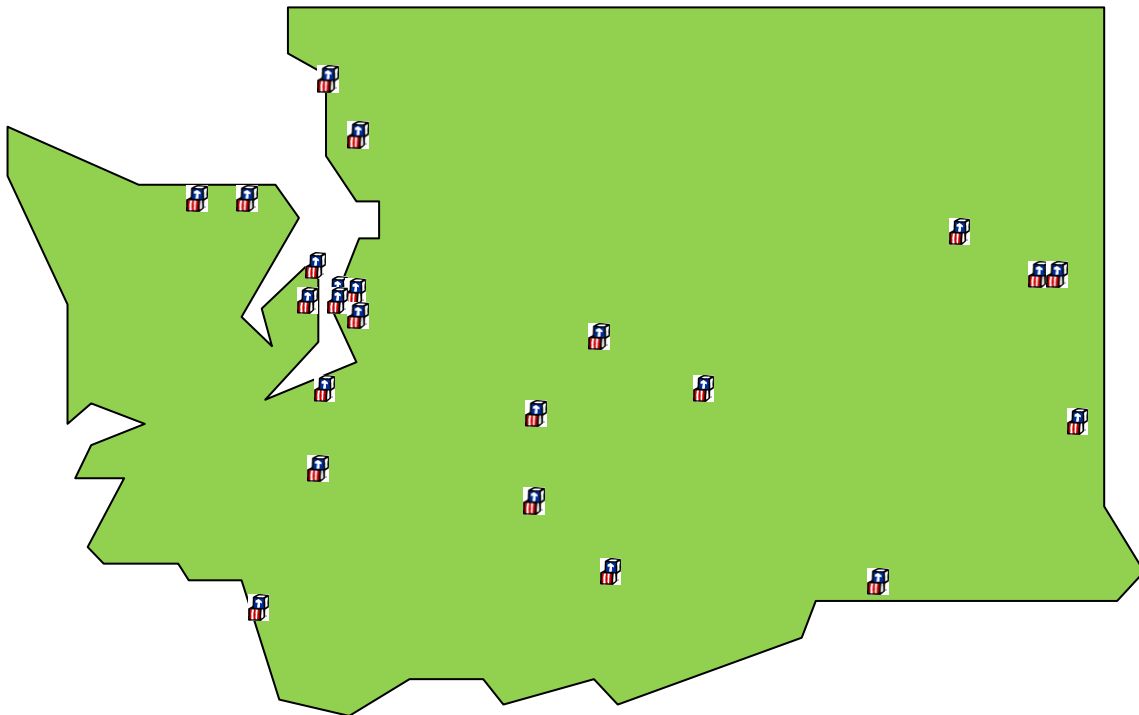
Response rate

The survey was released to all Washington programs, including Head Start, Early Head Start, Migrant/Seasonal Head Start, and American Indian/Alaska Native Head Start. Programs had until December 2008 to complete survey. The HSSCO in DEL granted an extension through January to programs who did not respond by December. In total, we received 23 completed surveys out of the total 49 eligible programs. The charts below show responses by program type and geographical location.

Figure 3. Responses by Program Type

Program Respondents	Percentage
Head Start	95.8%
Early Head Start	54.2%
Migrant/Seasonal Head Start	4.2%
American Indian/Alaska Native	4.2%
Child Care Partnership Option	20.8%

Figure 4. Respondent Locations



Survey Results

After receiving the completed surveys, we analyzed results and compiled summaries to inform the strategic plan. Below are highlights from the survey, to include an overall summary of strengths, as well

as an outline of the challenges identified for each of the nine (9) priority areas. Full survey results can be viewed in Appendix A at the end of this report.

Summary of Strengths

It is important to emphasize that the following summary represents a “snapshot” view of strengths identified through the needs assessment survey, and does not represent the wide-range of strengths that programs possess with regard to collaboration and coordination in the nine priority areas.

- Partnering with oral health professionals on oral health-related issues
- Partnerships and collaboration with medical/dental community
- Multiple resources/grants available to access in supporting family/child literacy activities
- Partnerships with school districts to prepare transition plans and align curriculum/assessment
- Programs who operate Head Start and ECEAP (dually funded) report strong partnerships with DEL and school districts
- Most programs have strong partnerships with two-year higher education institutions
- Programs report strong partnerships with law enforcement agencies and child abuse/neglect service agencies
- Programs report high levels of coordination and collaboration with the Department of Social and Health Services

Summary of Challenges

Health Care

Survey questions about health care assessed the programs’ relationships with members of the health community, including medical, mental health and dental providers, as well as local agencies and community resources. Some challenges emerged, including:

- Assisting parents to effectively communicate with medical and dental providers
- Helping families with transportation
- Getting full representation on the Health Services Advisory Committee (HSAC)
- Families not following through with appointments
- Limited mental health services
- Lack of medical and dental coverage for parents in the families

The majority of programs found it “not at all difficult” to link children to dental and medical homes and to partner with medical professionals on health-related issues. Other strong partnerships included those with public health services and local agencies providing mental health prevention and treatment.

Children and Families Experiencing Homelessness

In the survey, programs were asked to assess their relationships with community partners as well as their own policies, procedures, and data collection related to families experiencing homelessness. Some barriers included:

- A number of programs reporting “no working relationship” with the local McKinney-Vento liaison
- Difficulty obtaining sufficient data on the needs of homeless children and families

- Difficulty developing family outreach, supports, and transition planning with the local school districts

Most programs reported cooperative relationships with local housing agencies, planning groups and agencies serving homeless families. Programs reported it was not difficult to implement policies and procedures that ensure homeless children are prioritized for enrollment.

Family and Child Assistance Needs

This section examined the variety of social services that a Head Start program may help a family to access, including child care subsidies, food stamps, and/or employment assistance. Many programs noted “no working relationship” with the Council for Children and Families (formerly Washington Council for Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect/WCPCAN) and networks supporting children of incarcerated parents.

Programs reported stronger relationships with the Department of Social and Health Services—both the Community Services Division that helps families with food stamps, Medicaid, child care subsidies and other assistance; and the Children’s Administration that includes networks supporting foster and adoptive families. There were also good partnerships with DEL, the Community Task Force on Substance Abuse and community resource guides and hotlines. However, several programs did note struggles with eligibility and continuity of child care subsidies; the need for more support of foster care families; and access to mental health services.

Child Care

For many Head Start families, it is necessary to find safe, healthy and affordable child care. In the survey, Head Start programs reported it was “somewhat difficult” or “difficult” to:

- Align practices and policies with service providers
- Establish partnerships with child care providers
- Assist families in accessing full-day, full-year services
- Support families in accessing child care subsidies

Additional child care issues were noted in the written responses from programs, including:

- Subsidy maintenance and continuity
- Limited care for infants and toddlers
- Access to quality care

In reference to quality care, programs noted a lack of availability and choice, limited options in rural areas, language barriers, and the high cost of child care. Head Start programs did report access to resources related to child care, including child care resource & referral agencies.

Family Literacy Services

Head Start programs reported having relationships with many community programs to help families improve literacy. These included:

- Public/private sources providing donations or funding for books
- Services to promote parent/child literacy interactions

- Parent education programs/services

It can be difficult, programs reported, to recruit families into family literacy services because of lack of access in rural communities, the time commitment, and other issues. Head Start programs indicated that they continue to address illiteracy by applying for grants and funding; partnering with schools; and accessing programs such as National Head Start Family Literacy Center, United Way's Readers, and Raising a Reader.

Children with Disabilities

In assisting children with disabilities, Head Start programs reported several areas that needed improvement. Responses included that it could be "extremely difficult" to secure services for children in the summer months and "somewhat difficult" or "difficult" to obtain timely evaluations of children.

Most programs reported strong relationships with local school districts in helping children with disabilities, and they had little difficulty with their staff attending meetings to discuss a child's educational plan or sharing data with other service providers. Issues can arise, however, when there are language barriers with families, and with the length, wording and difficulty of the process to create specific plans for a child's needs—Individual Family Service Plans (IFSP) and Individual Education Plans (IEP). Narrative responses included a lack of access to some resources, such as physical therapy.

Community Services

Creating partnerships with private resources such as foundations and business can be "somewhat difficult," Head Start programs said in the survey. A number of programs, however, said they have been successful working with law enforcement agencies and providers of child abuse prevention/treatment services. Other successful links have been forged with Community Task Forces and Interagency Children's Councils, and through community meetings.

Education: Pre-K

In survey questions about education and pre-k partnerships, most Head Start programs reported they had little trouble connecting with communities and related resources. Most found it easy to hold parent outreach activities. They drew positive attention to partnerships with school districts around training and community collaboration toward kindergarten readiness.

There were several areas, however, where programs felt improvement was needed. These included:

- Program technical assistance
- Alignment of educational activities, curricular objectives, and instruction
- School district relationships (primarily around disabilities services)
- Transition plans among school districts

Education: Transitions

As children transition into kindergarten, partnerships with the local school districts become more even more important. While a majority of Head Start programs reported working collaboratively with school districts around transitions, they indicated that more work needs to be done around aligning curricula and assessment practices. More coordination of other support services for children and families is also needed, programs reported. Comments about positive work included development of transition teams and kindergarten packets as well as school district staff participating in Head Start program events.

Professional Development

A shortage of time and money was the theme in the survey responses regarding professional development. Almost 70 percent of programs reported difficulty accessing financial support for professional development activities, and 80 percent struggled to find staff release time to attend activities. Most programs reported collaborative relationships with institutions of higher education and technical and community colleges. Most programs reported easy access to early childhood degree programs in the community, a minority reported limited options.

Conclusions and Next Steps

The HSSCO shared the results of both the needs assessment survey and the survey sent to external partners with an advisory team composed of Head Start directors from across the state and worked with this group to distill priorities and practical strategies from the data. The conclusions of this work form the basis of the HSSCO's new strategic plan which is organized into 5 broad goal areas:

- **Goal #1: Increase the availability of appropriate and coordinated health services for children and families**
- **Goal #2: Improved ability of families to obtain quality early learning programs and services that meet their needs**
- **Goal #3: Improve/increase opportunities for Head Start/Early Head Start programs to be involved in state-level activities, initiatives and programs that enhance services to children and families**
- **Goal #4: Contribute to the development of a coordinated, statewide comprehensive professional development system for all early learning professionals in Washington State**
- **Goal #5: Improve the governance, functional operations, and perceptions of the HSSCO to be a transparent and inclusive leader in supporting policies and initiatives that further advance services to children and families**

The Strategic plan will guide the work of the HSSCO in the coming 5 years with updates annually based on the changing needs of Head Start programs within the ever-changing landscape of early learning in Washington State.